

Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning and Student Services in Australia

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In Australia at the end of the 20th century, 26% of the population was born overseas and 15% speaks a language other than English at home. In multicultural Sydney, 26% speaks a language other than English at home.

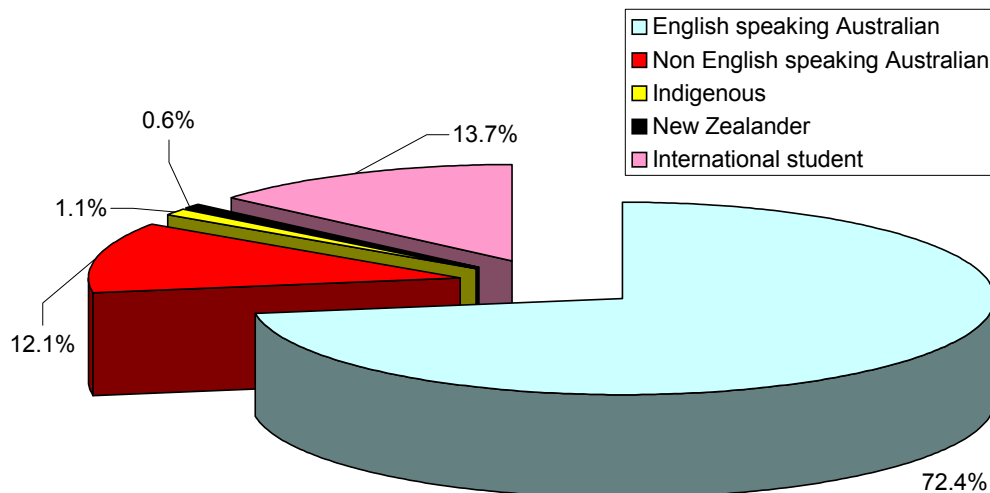
In dealing with such a multicultural workforce, Australia has tended to stereotype its migrants, focusing on perceived cultural deficits or deficiencies that needed to be remedied before they could work effectively in Australia. The stereotyping often focused on difficulties with the English language.

More recent work, under the label **Productive Diversity**, has shifted the focus to the cultural proficiencies of a culturally diverse workforce. Australia has a competitive advantage through the diverse cultural and linguistic skills of the workforce, its international networks, its country knowledge and life experience.

A culturally diverse workforce can make more things better, especially for export.

The analogy with the workforce is useful in dealing with a culturally diverse student population, and we will develop the analogy further a little later.

Australian University Student Population Cultural Diversity



In the Australian university system, 14.3% of students are international (including New Zealanders), 12.1% are Australians who speak a language other than English at home and 1.1% are indigenous, making up 27% of students that can be described as culturally diverse. Just 73% are stereotypical *true blues*.

While 14.3% of the student population in the year 2000 was international, 19.5% of *first year* students were international. Diversity is increasing.

Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans

Australian universities display commitment to this diversity.

Each year universities are required to submit their Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans to Australia's Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. DETYA then publishes these plans as **Quality of Australian Higher Education**. The most recent publication is dated December 2000.

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is a unique institution. It exists to provide education and training to indigenous Australians, mainly from remote and traditionally oriented communities. A graduate of Batchelor Institute will have *an appreciation and valuing of cultural and intellectual diversity, and ability to function in a multicultural or global environment*.

A number of Australian universities articulate diversity in their mission statements.

Charles Sturt University, a rural, multi-campus institution, includes in its mission statement the provision of *a variety of learning environments to meet the different needs of students drawn from diverse educational, social, ethnic and economic backgrounds*.

Curtin University of Technology, a key member of the Australian Technology Network of universities, *values the enhancement of diversity in gender, age, social circumstances, culture, beliefs, attitudes, and values the recognition of the particular place of Australia's indigenous peoples*.

Southern Cross University, another rural, multi-campus university, *is committed to equity and cultural diversity, with a particular focus on its region's indigenous peoples*.

The University of Melbourne, a research intensive member of Australia's Group of Eight, lists as an outcome its *continued development of a University-wide cultural diversity program which commits the University to a culture in which all students and staff share an appreciation of cultural diversity in outlook, values and understanding*. Melbourne expects its graduates to have *international awareness and openness to the world based on understanding and appreciation of social and cultural diversity and respect for individual human rights and dignity*.

University of Technology, Sydney, another member of the Australian Technology Network, has objectives to *attract a talented, diverse and motivated student body from both within Australia and overseas and to develop a University culture which values and supports diversity, engenders social responsibility, is sensitive to ethical issues and receptive to new ideas and critical enquiry*.

Other universities express diversity through their statements of the attributes of their graduates. Adelaide expects *a profound sense of social justice, a commitment to ethical behaviour and an understanding of the role of cultural diversity*. Murdoch seeks to produce graduates with *an ability to understand and respect the social, biological and economic diversity of global life*. Newcastle strives for *respect for and commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultures and aspirations and appreciation and valuing of cultural and intellectual diversity and ability to function in a multicultural and international environment*. Wollongong's attributes include *an appreciation and valuing of cultural and intellectual diversity and ability to function in a multicultural or global environment*.

If we drill down a little deeper. Deakin University's Teaching and Learning Management Plan, subsidiary to its Strategic Planning Framework, sets the objectives that *Deakin will be enriched by the increasing cultural diversity of its students and Deakin will incorporate international and intercultural perspectives and inclusive pedagogy into its courses in order to meet the needs of a diverse body of students*.

Cultural Deficiencies and Cultural Proficiencies

Despite these statements about missions, objectives and graduate attributes, the reality does not yet match the rhetoric. Universities in Australia, specifically at the grassroots level where first year students are taught, commonly have adopted a *cultural deficit* approach to international students. International students have been stereotyped as an homogenous group, rote learners, passive, sticking to their own community and lacking analytical and critical thinking skills. Universities have taken the view that international students need to adapt to the dominant culture to maintain standards of excellence, have provided special support services to international students and have offered cross-cultural training programs to staff to ensure that they are competent to deal with international students' special circumstances.

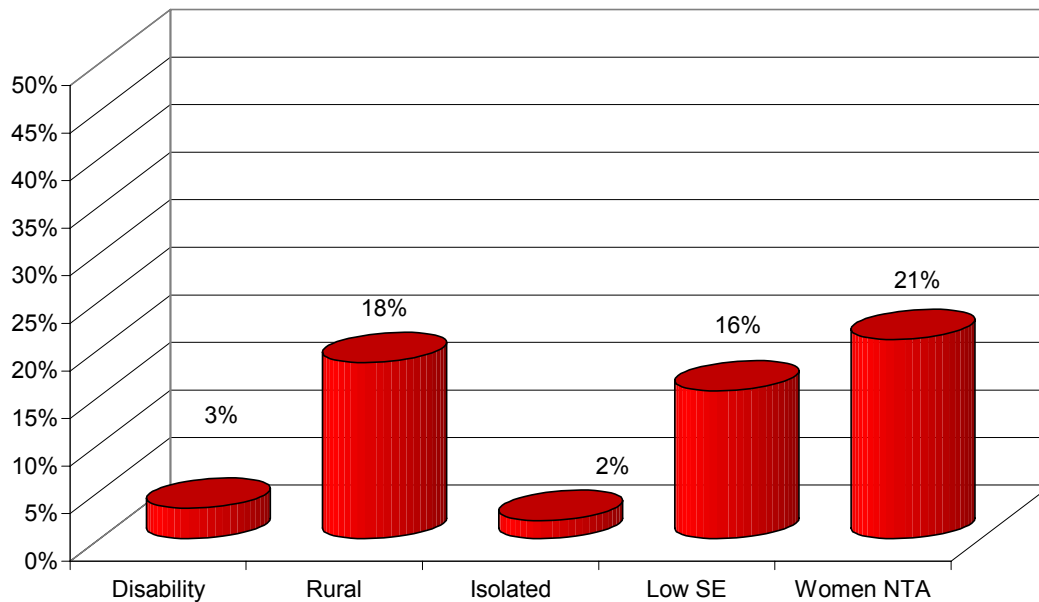
The stereotype can be simpler – international students drag standards down, often because of their poor English. The stereotype is rampant, of course, in the first year of higher education.

As a matter of fact, international students do not drag standards down - we can look at that point later.

But with the stereotype focusing on difficulties with English, we start to see the relevance of the analogy with the workforce.

There is further diversity within the Australian university system. Of Australian students, 3% indicate that they have a disability, 18% are from rural postcodes, including 2% from isolated postcodes, 16% are from postcodes with low socio-economic status and 56% are women, including 21% in non-traditional fields of study.

Australian University Student Population Equity Groups



So perhaps the issues of diversity and inclusivity are not just about *cultural deficits*.

The *deficit approach* is broader. It suggests that international students, or students with disabilities, or women, can be brought up to *normal standard* by redressing their *deficits*.

It is useful to return to the analogy with workforce diversity.

An Inclusive View of Diversity

The Australian Government currently is seeking to commission further work on the inclusion of Diversity Management in business education programs. Its brief includes the finding that

business has advised the Government that issues of diversity in the private sector will only be addressed through adopting an inclusive view of diversity which sees

attributes such as gender, age, race, religion, sexual preference and disability as key components of diversity management, as well as culture.

Perhaps we need to take a similar view with university student populations. We need to take an inclusive view of diversity in order to address the issues of diversity and inclusivity.

We need to define diversity in the broadest terms before we address it.

When we look at tools such as a Teaching Diversity checklist and a Diversity Audit of student services, we need to define diversity broadly, to include not just cultural diversity, as typified by international students, students from diverse backgrounds and indigenous students, but also students with disabilities, students from rural or isolated postcodes, students from lower socio-economic postcodes and women in non-traditional areas.

There are other measures of diversity, but maybe if we address a sufficiently broad range we will have brought about culture change.

In a university culture of *cultural proficiency*, universities will acknowledge and value differences. Students will be valued for their diversity, with a range of attitudes to learning. Services will be provided to students to encourage self-sufficiency. And the diversity of student populations will provide opportunities for staff to broaden and enrich their teaching experience. Nowhere will such culture change have more impact than in the first year of higher education.

It was in the context of this inclusive approach to diversity that The University of Western Australia undertook two staff development projects on diversity and inclusivity.

Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD)

The Australian Government from 1997 to 1999 operated a program to identify and promote good teaching, learning and assessment practices in universities, to encourage and foster innovation in higher education teaching and to provide staff development opportunities for academic and administrative staff. The program of grants was operated by the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD). In work that is forthcoming, I was a participant last year in the review of the CUTSD initiative.

Most grants went to initiatives that produced computer based learning resources, including a virtual faculty, a virtual classroom for teacher training, a virtual archeological dig, a virtual patient, a virtual embryo, a virtual head and a virtual rat.

The program also provided grants for staff development. The University of Western Australia recognised that culture change essentially is an issue of staff development.

The University received funding through CUTSD for two projects

- Achieving Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning
- Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students: Responding to a Diverse Student Body.

Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning

The first of these two staff development projects at The University of Western Australia sought to introduce an inclusive curriculum. The rationale for trialing inclusive teaching practices at UWA was in part a response to significant changes in the student population, and concurrently, the need to provide all graduates with the skills and knowledge appropriate to an increasingly diverse and global environment.

The term 'inclusive curriculum' as used in this project refers to both primary and secondary curriculum content, as well as the processes of teaching, learning and assessment practices. Inclusivity is concerned with facilitating the best educational outcomes for all students, regardless of characteristics such as gender, race, disability, sexuality, socio-economic status and cultural background.

In tertiary education, an inclusive approach aims to establish an environment which recognises, respects and responds to human diversity. This approach encourages teachers to consider diversity in all curriculum processes - in selecting curriculum materials, in defining the philosophical underpinnings of a course, and in the choice of teaching and assessment strategies.

The UWA project drew on earlier work from Victoria University in defining inclusive curriculum.

An inclusive curriculum

- values the culture, background and experience of all students
- is inclusive of gender, culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, sexualities and differences related to disability and socio-economic background
- acknowledges that any curriculum decision is a selection rather than a complete truth
- makes explicit the rationales underpinning course design
- is responsive to the knowledge base of students and staff.

UWA then took the project further.

While many lecturers and others involved in curriculum development supported the need to make the curriculum more inclusive, there was uncertainty about how this was to be achieved. As a result there were ongoing requests to provide guidelines.

The result, following consultation, production of a draft and subsequent review and endorsement, is a **Teaching with Diversity Checklist**.

The checklist covers five areas

- Curriculum Design
- Content
- Delivery
- Assessment
- Duty of Care.

In the written version of this paper, the checklist is included in full.

1. Curriculum Design

In designing the curriculum do you:

- consider your students' gender, cultural backgrounds, learning styles, health and disability status, English language proficiency, numeracy, values and experiences?
- take account of students' prior knowledge and learning?
- seek participation in curriculum design from people with specialist expertise?
- include opportunities for a positive engagement with other cultures, practices and life expectations?
- include texts and readings which reflect a diversity of perspectives?

2. Content

Does the course content:

- acknowledge the diversity of knowledge and experience of your students?
- use examples/case studies which are free of negative stereotypes or assumptions?
- examine the implications of diversity as part of the theory or practice being studied?
- encourage students to recognise and understand different ways of knowing?

3. Delivery

In your teaching do you:

- provide students with a range of learning opportunities?
- encourage students to know and listen to each other?
- avoid using negative or potentially offensive stereotypes or assumptions?
- actively encourage all students to take responsibility for learning?
- encourage students to use their backgrounds as a learning tool?
- make available teaching notes, overhead transparencies and recorded lectures?
- speak in plain English, explain acronyms and avoid unnecessary colloquialisms?
- actively discourage language or behaviour which is racist, sexist, and homophobic or which demeans people with disabilities?

4. Assessment

Is your student assessment:

- transparent and able to provide students with timely and appropriate feedback?
- supportive of students developing habits of routinely assessing their own work?
- free of culturally or gender biased examples?*
- able to accurately assess intended learning outcomes?
- in plain English and free of unnecessary colloquialisms and acronyms?
- flexible enough to assess the learning outcomes of students with disabilities?

Consideration of these questions will assist in the development of curricula that will improve learning outcomes for all students.

5. Duty of Care

In addition to academic responsibilities for teaching and learning, UWA staff have a duty of care towards students to foster and maintain an environment which is physically safe, accepting of individual differences and free from intimidation, racial and sexual harassment and other unlawful behaviour. Issues relating to duty of care might include staff modelling appropriate behaviour, as well as early intervention in instances of racial discrimination, bullying or sexual harassment in teaching situations and elsewhere on campus.

Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students

Complementary and subsequent to the project on Diversity and Inclusivity in Teaching and Learning was a second project on student services.

At the heart of that project was the concept of Diversity Audits. A Diversity Audit is a self-assessment exercise that can help to identify whether services provided by a department or by a central section are inclusive of all groups within its target group of clients. The main tool for the audit is a matrix used to identify diversity characteristics of students who use the services provided.

Self Assessment – Diversity Audit

Services (examples)	Student Diversity Variables (examples)							
	Culture	Religion	Language	Gender	Age	Disability/illness	Geography	Socioeconomic
Counter enquiries								
Telephone enquiries								
Forms								
Availability of appointments								
Website information								

A key recommendation of the project was for the use of Diversity Audits.

That diversity audits be carried out as part of the departmental review process by departments and sections providing services to students, and that those who lead and manage student services throughout the University include diversity audits as part of the strategic planning and budgeting process and as part of any change process involving services to students.

Diversity audits should become part of the self-assessment process in departmental reviews so that student services are reviewed on a regular basis as part of a formal and rigorous process. In addition, including a diversity audit as part of the annual strategic planning and budget planning processes would enable departments and sections to identify progress made and further actions needed to provide inclusive services, and to ensure that additional or modified services are adequately funded. An abbreviated diversity audit should be carried out as part of any change process involving the provision of services to students.....

The University of Western Australia project on Inclusivity in Providing Services to Students is much broader than the issue of Diversity Audits. For example, the project included a study on the types of problems with technology experienced by older students, or *silver surfers*.

The two simple tools from The University of Western Australia

- Teaching with Diversity Checklist
- Self Assessment – Diversity Audit

are the key advances that I want to present to a wider audience.

Unquestionably they are simple, but they do make the significant step from rhetoric to reality, they do answer the ongoing requests for practical guidelines from the centres of universities on diversity and inclusivity.

The Comparative Performance of International Students

I indicated earlier that I would respond to the proposition that international students drag standards down, often because of their poor English.

The definitive Australian study in this area is a 1998 paper from Dobson et al. They looked at the performance of all undergraduates in Australian universities in 1996 in terms of *student progress units*, calculating the ratio of subjects passed to subjects attempted.

Dobson et al concluded

- overall, international students significantly outperformed Australian students
- international students outperformed Australian students in Architecture, Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences, Business, Engineering and Science
- there was no statistically significant difference in the performance of international students and Australian students in Agriculture, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Other Health, Law or Veterinary Science.

Similarly, Hacket and Nowak (1999) looked at the academic performance of thousands of Curtin University of Technology students, across all fields of study, and compared the performance of Australian students onshore in Perth, international students onshore in Perth and international students at offshore campuses. They found that what made most difference was gender.

Girls do better than boys.

About the Author

Alan Olsen Alan.Olsen@spre.com.sg is a researcher, strategist and policy adviser on international education, based in Singapore, where he is a Director of Strategy Policy and Research in Education Pte Ltd www.spre.com.sg. He has worked in international education in Hong Kong, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney.

Alan provides consultancy services to universities such as Deakin University, University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong, University of South Australia, Queensland University of Technology, Macquarie University and The University of Auckland, and to other education entities such as the Centre for British Teachers, The Good Universities Guides and IDP Education Australia.

In 2001 he will be joint author of **An Evaluation of the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD) Initiative**, with a draft currently being reviewed by Australia's Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

In 2000, he was joint author of **Transnational Education: Providers, Partners and Policy** on the challenges for Australian institutions offering courses offshore. He is joint author of chapters in Peter Scott's **Higher Education Reformed** (Falmer Press, London, 2000) and Keith Harry's **Higher Education through Open and Distance Learning** (Routledge, London, 1999).

He is joint editor of **International Education: The Professional Edge** (1999), and **Outcomes of International Education: Research Findings** (1998), two series of commissioned research papers.

His earlier publications as joint author include

- **Becoming Internationally Competitive: The Value of International Experience for Australian Students** (1999)
- **Internationalisation and Tertiary Education in New Zealand** (1998)
- **Comparative Costs of Higher Education Courses for International Students in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Canada and the US** (1997)
- **Skills Recognition Directory for Professional Occupations in ASEAN and Australia** (1996)
- **Internationalisation and Higher Education: Goals and Strategies** (1996).

He commissioned and edited the 1995 IDP Education Australia study **International Education: Australia's Potential Demand and Supply**.

Alan has a Bachelor of Arts degree with First Class Honours in Philosophy from The University of Sydney and a Graduate Diploma in Finance from University of Technology, Sydney.

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